

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Commissioner

Kentucky Department of Education
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Steven L. Beshear
Governor

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Kentucky Department for Public Health
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September 15, 2014

Dear Superintendent:

Providing for the safety of students and developing lifelong learning skills are key components of every school. Is your school district doing everything it can to protect youth against the number one cause of preventable death in the United States and Kentucky? Has your school district passed a 100 percent tobacco-free school policy? If so, we applaud and thank you; and if not, please let us share with you why youth tobacco use is such a concern.

Thanks in part to strong efforts by schools, youth smoking in Kentucky has decreased from 24.1 percent in 2011 to the current rate of 17.9 percent according to the 2013 Kentucky Youth Risk Behavior Survey. More work needs to be done, however, as 47 percent of high school students have tried smoking at least once and 13.2 percent have used smokeless tobacco.

While smoking on school property has decreased 46 percent in Kentucky in the past two years, the Surgeon General has found that any amount of secondhand smoke exposure on school property can be dangerous to students and staff. Tobacco-free school policies are one way your school can help reduce youth smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke.

A 100 percent tobacco-free school policy prohibits tobacco use by staff, students, and visitors 24 hours a day, seven days a week, inside board-owned buildings or vehicles, on school-owned property and during school-sponsored student trips and activities.

A 100 percent tobacco-free school policy reflects a firm commitment by school administration, teachers and parents to provide students, personnel, and community members a safe, tobacco-free environment. Tobacco-free schools give adults the opportunity to be role models for tobacco-free lifestyles and set the tone for reduced social acceptance of tobacco use. In addition, studies show that students in tobacco-free schools are less likely to start smoking. Surveys of parents, staff, and students find overwhelming support for tobacco-free school policies.

Governor Steve Beshear has made improving the health and wellness of Kentucky's children, families and workforce one of his highest priorities. To significantly advance the wellbeing of Kentucky's citizens, Governor Beshear has made 100 percent tobacco-free school policies one of the strategies of his kyhealthnow initiative.



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For more information on the goals and strategies of kyhealthnow, visit the following website:
<http://governor.ky.gov/healthierky/kyhealthnow/pages/default.aspx>.

In Kentucky there are 35 out of 173 school districts that have passed 100 percent Tobacco Free School policies. To see a current map of where these districts are located and other resources, including model policies, please use this link: www.tobaccofreeschoolsky.org.

Passing a 100 percent tobacco-free school policy is important for your school and your students. We encourage you to pass and implement a policy today.

For more information, please contact Elizabeth Anderson-Hoagland at ElizabethA.Hoagland@ky.gov or Jamie Sparks at Jamie.Sparks@education.ky.gov.

Thank you for all you do in providing and supporting the education and health of Kentucky's students.

Sincerely,



Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Commissioner
Kentucky Department of Education



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Kentucky Department for Public Health



Gov. Steve Beshear launched [kyhealthnow](#) earlier this year in an effort to improve the health of all Kentuckians. It is an aggressive and wide-ranging initiative to significantly reduce incidence and deaths from Kentucky's dismal health rankings and habits. It builds on Kentucky's successful implementation of health care reform and uses multiple strategies over the next several years to improve the state's collective health.